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Illinois was a loser in the last federal transportation bill, but a powerful one-two legislative punch should ensure the state does better this time, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said.

"Illinois lost because there was no bipartisan cooperation, because there was fighting between the suburbs and the city," the Highland Park Republican told a group of business and civic leaders Monday during a transportation forum at the Hyatt hotel in Deerfield.

This time, Illinois has two "incredibly powerful" congressmen, Democrat William Lipinski of Chicago and House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Yorkville Republican, presenting a unified front, Kirk said.

"They like each other a great deal and have single-handedly rebuilt the bipartisan cooperation we need," said Kirk, referring to the upcoming federal transportation funding bill, known as TEA-3.

The measure has had top elected leaders throughout the country debating which transportation projects will make the cut and how much will be allocated to the program over the next six years. Extended twice since fall, the legislation has an April 30 deadline.

The Senate has passed a \$318 billion package. A House committee last week approved a \$275 billion proposal, down from an original proposal of \$375 billion. The House bill is scheduled for floor action this week. House and Senate versions will be melded into a single plan.

In a worst-case scenario, Illinois will get 28 percent more than it did in the last authorization, Kirk said, compared with an average increase among other states of 12 percent.

The funding would include \$1.2 billion for the STAR line, a suburb-to-suburb rail connection from O'Hare International Airport to Hoffman Estates and then Joliet. Money for nine other transit projects, including the CTA Circle Line to connect bus and commuter rail stations, also is being sought.

"That shows you the Hastert-Lipinski factor (is) at work," Kirk said. Lipinski is a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and top Democrat on the subcommittee on highways, transit and pipelines.

Kirk said his top highway project for the 10th District is the widening of Route 60 over I-94.

Illinois has five primary goals this time, said Dick Smith, director of planning and programming for the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Chief among them is increasing Illinois' share of federal money, in part by changing the formula for awarding transit funds. The new transportation bill also may include a "reopener" that would allow for increases in two years if revenues are available, he said.

Otherwise, he cautioned participants not to expect any new highway projects to be added to the list.

Monday's meeting was the second in a series of forums with members of Congress hosted by the 180-member Business Leaders for Transportation.

Kirk and others agree transportation improvements accelerate economic growth.